



Living in Loon Territory

Simple steps for living
peacefully with our neighbors

Please obey Maine's laws that protect wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Common Loons are protected by both state and federal laws prohibiting harassment of wildlife. For more information or to report violations, contact the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Shoreland Zoning

Activities like logging, clearing, and construction are restricted within 250 feet of lakes and ponds 10 acres or larger and within 75 feet of streams by Maine's Shoreland Zoning Act. Your town may have additional rules, so check with your town office for details or call the Maine Department of Environmental Protection at 207.287.2111.

Boating

- Watercraft operators cannot disturb, chase, or harass wildlife.
- All watercraft must be kept at or under head-way speed and leave no wake within 200 feet of any shoreline.
- The operation of personal watercraft is prohibited on some Maine lakes and ponds. Visit the IFW website for a list of waters.
- All motorized watercraft on inland waters must display a "Preserve Maine Waters" sticker, also known as a "Milfoil Sticker."
- All vegetation must be cleaned off boats and trailers before entering and after leaving a lake or river.

Angling

The sale of lead sinkers and bare-headed jigs 1 ounce or less or 2 1/2 inches long or less is banned in Maine.

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Maine Department
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Residents & Visitors

Loons need clean, clear water so they can catch fish. Shoreline development can impact water quality by increasing run-off, erosion, and contamination by household chemicals. Shoreline development may eliminate nesting habitat or reduce habitat quality by increasing disturbance and predation.

A few simple things you can do to help loons:

- Reduce run-off and erosion from your waterfront property by encouraging natural vegetation along the shoreline.
- Use only phosphate-free detergent and fertilizer.
- Keep pets from running wild along lake shores and harassing wildlife.
- Make sure garbage is out of reach of loon predators like skunks and raccoons.
- Enjoy loons from a distance with binoculars or a spotting scope, especially if they are nesting near your camp.
- Post a *Look Out for Loons* sign at your local boat ramp.
- Join the Maine Audubon Annual Loon Count.
- Earn a LakeSmart and Loon Smart award by being a lake-friendly property owner. Visit: mainelakesociety.org/lakesmart.

Anglers

Healthy fish populations make lakes and ponds popular for both loons and anglers.

Anglers who stay for long periods in secluded coves or around islands can disturb nesting loons. They can be spooked off their nest, leaving their eggs susceptible to predators and the elements.

Fishing gear poses problems for loons. Every year, loons die after becoming entangled in monofilament line. Lead poisoning from lead sinkers and lead-headed jigs is a leading cause of death for adult loons in Maine.



A few tips for fishing with loons:

- Avoid fishing for prolonged periods in secluded coves where loons may be nesting or feeding, especially in early summer when the eggs and young chicks are most vulnerable.
- Use only lead-free sinkers and jigs, and properly dispose of old lead tackle.
- Retrieve and properly dispose of broken fishing line. Pick up discarded tackle and line.
- For more information, visit: fishleadfree.org.

Boaters

Collisions with speeding boats and personal watercraft are unfortunately one of the leading causes of death for loons in Maine.

Boat wakes can easily overwhelm small chicks and flood a loon's shoreline nest. This is a particular problem when personal watercraft circle in one area for long periods of time.

Canoers and kayakers can get much too close to unsuspecting loons on their nests. They may unwittingly paddle near loons and startle them off nests, leaving eggs unprotected.

A few ways to reduce boating impacts:

- Watch for loons and keep your distance, especially in shallow coves used as nursery areas and where loons have trouble diving to escape. Slow down when close to shore.
- Stay away from nesting loons. If you find one, move out of the area.
- Back away when loons display warning signs.
- Learn loon behavior by following the "Loon Calendar." (Boating activity during the Memorial Day and July Fourth holidays can be particularly hard on loons.)
- Keep milfoil and other invasive exotic plants out of Maine's lakes by keeping your boat and trailer "weed free."

Loon Calendar

April

Common Loons return to Maine's lakes right after ice out, and spend about a month establishing their territories and bonding with their mates.

Watch for pairs of loons exhibiting courtship displays like dipping their bills in the water or swimming around each other in circles.

May-June

Loons build their nests of dead vegetation and mud right on the shoreline, away from prevailing winds, waves, and human activity. They often nest on small islands where there are fewer predators and people.

Watch for single birds in quiet, shallow coves and near islands. Parents take turns sitting on the eggs.

July-August

After about 27 days, the eggs hatch and the loon family moves to a nearby "nursery" area. The loon parents spend much of their time catching small fish for hungry chicks. Young chicks ride on their parents' backs to stay warm and safe from predators.

Watch for pairs of loons with one or two small chicks in tow or on their backs. The chicks are quite small when they first hatch, so may be difficult to see.

September-October

Most chicks can now feed themselves and fly. Their parents leave them to congregate in large groups, or "rafts." Groups of chicks will gather together later in the fall in "rafts" of their own.

Watch for large gatherings of loons on lakes and ponds. Adult loons may be molting into their dull gray and white winter plumage so may look very similar to the drab but full-grown juveniles.

November-March

Loons spend the winter resting and feeding along the coast. Juvenile loons will wait about seven years before they return to fresh water to breed.

Watch for the dull gray and white plumage of wintering adults and juveniles close to shore all along the coast of Maine.

Watching Common Loons



and listening to their haunting calls is a popular activity for visitors to Maine's lakes and ponds. Loons have many fascinating behaviors that are easy to observe from afar. If you're lucky, you may see a loon dive for a fish and feed its chick. Or you may see a loon preen its feathers or peer in the water, looking for its next meal.

For the best view, watch loons with binoculars or through a spotting scope. Loons can be very sensitive, and may stop feeding their chicks or leave their nest and eggs if disturbed. Luckily, loons are very good at letting you know when you've come too close.

Watch for these signs:

- A loon is splashing across the water doing the "penguin dance." The loon appears to stand up in the water and move toward you in an aggressive manner, sometimes also making the distinctive "yodel" call. 
- A loon is vocalizing at you. Listen for the "tremolo," a quavering laugh commonly given when loons are annoyed or alarmed. 
- A loon is lying very flat on the shoreline with its head down. The loon is on a nest and if approached will slide into the water, leaving the eggs exposed to predators and the elements. 

If you see these signs, take the hint and move away!